

Fall 8-15-2003

ENG 4300-4390-002-099: Political Fictions, Fictional Politics

Zahlan

Eastern Illinois University

Follow this and additional works at: http://thekeep.eiu.edu/english_syllabi_fall2003



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Zahlan, "ENG 4300-4390-002-099: Political Fictions, Fictional Politics" (2003). *Fall 2003*. 136.
http://thekeep.eiu.edu/english_syllabi_fall2003/136

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the 2003 at The Keep. It has been accepted for inclusion in Fall 2003 by an authorized administrator of The Keep. For more information, please contact tabruns@eiu.edu.

4300-002
4390-099

POLITICAL FICTIONS, FICTIONAL POLITICS
English 4300/90: Senior Seminar

Fall 2003
Sections 02/99
1230-1345 TR
CH 3139

Dr. Zahlan
Office: CH3556
581-6977
cfarz@eiu.edu

The opinion that art should have nothing to do with politics is itself a political attitude.
--George Orwell ("Why I Write")

... [A]ll literature must be read as a symbolic meditation on the destiny of community.
--Frederic Jameson (*The Political Unconscious*)

TEXTS

Chinua Achebe, *A Man of the People*; Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*;
Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*; Nadine Gordimer, *Burger's Daughter*;
Graham Greene, *The Quiet American*; Nawal el-Saadawi, *Woman at Point Zero*;
Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *A Grain of Wheat*; Anthony Trollope, *Phineas Finn*
Voltaire, *Candide*; Robert Penn Warren, *All the King's Men*;
(Additional Recommended Texts: Harmon, *A Handbook to Literature*;
MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers)

AIMS OF THE COURSE

The Senior Seminar in English is designed as a "capstone experience" for English Majors who are approaching graduation. In this Seminar, we will study a number of fictional texts from different cultures and periods, some of which may have been studied in earlier courses. Considering that literary texts embody views of history, politics, and society, we will subject a variety of novels to political and literary analysis, looking for connections between ideology and narrative technique. Assigned texts include narratives that feature a politician as protagonist, a dystopia, fictions of colonial encounter, and novels of social protest or revolution. Reading, discussing, and writing about novels that focus on characters, events, or ideas of clearly political significance, we will increase our understanding of narrative and of the interactions of literature and society. We will also train ourselves to be alert to the social and political assumptions underlying works that may seem apolitical.

CLASS PROCEDURES

Seminar participants are expected to complete the assigned reading punctually, to keep a class journal, to be prepared for in-class writing assignments, and to contribute actively and constructively to discussion.

OFFICE HOURS

Tuesdays, 1400-1500; 1650-1750; Thursdays, 1400-1500; 1650-1750; By Appointment

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

WEEK I

- Tuesday, 26 August: Introduction and Assignments
Thursday, 28 August: Warren, *All the King's Men* (Read Chapters I and II for today.)

WEEK II

- Tuesday, 2 September: Warren, *All the King's Men* (Read at least Chapters I--VI for today.)
(Consider carefully the significance of Chapter IV.)
Thursday, 4 September: *All the King's Men* (Read at least Chapters I--VII for today.)

WEEK III

- Tuesday, 9 September: Complete *All the King's Men*.
Introduction to Achebe, *A Man of the People*
Thursday, 11 September: Achebe, *A Man of the People* (Have Chapters I-VIII completed).

WEEK IV

- Tuesday, 16 September: *A Man of the People* (Complete the novel for today.)
Thursday, 18 September: *A Man of the People* concluded;
Introduction to *Phineas Finn* (Read at least Chapters I-VI for today.) Discussion of Seminar Paper Research Projects.

WEEK V

- Tuesday, 23 September: *Phineas Finn* (Complete Volume I for today: study the political ideas embedded in the narrative, as for instance Mr. Turnbull's creed (in "Mr. Turnbull") and "Mr. Monk Upon Reform.")
Thursday, 25 September: *Phineas Finn* (Read as much as possible of Volume II for today; be prepared to discuss Mme. Goesler's politics and issues pertinent to the Reform Bill.)

WEEK VI

- Tuesday, 30 September: *Phineas Finn* concluded; (Finish the novel for today.)
Thursday, 2 October: MID-TERM EXAM (Bring test booklets to class.)

WEEK VII

- Tuesday, 7 October: Ellison, *Invisible Man* (Read Prologue and Chapters 1-8 for today.)
Paper I due in class; be prepared to share your paper with the class.
Thursday, 9 October: Ellison, *Invisible Man* continued (have at least 11 chapters read.)
Revisions due.

WEEK VIII

- Tuesday, 14 October: *Invisible Man* (Complete the novel for today.)
Thursday, 16 October: *Invisible Man* concluded (Reread "Prologue" and "Epilogue.")

WEEK IX

- Tuesday, 21 October: El-Saadawi, *Woman at Point Zero* (Read the book for today.)
Thursday, 23 October: *Woman at Point Zero* (concluded).

WEEK X

- Tuesday, 28 October: Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (Read at least half the book.)
Thursday, 30 October: *The Handmaid's Tale*

WEEK XI

Tuesday, 4 November: *The Handmaid's Tale* (Be sure to have finished the book by today.)
Thursday, 6 November: *The Handmaid's Tale* concluded (Be sure to read the Epilogue.)
Begin Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *A Grain of Wheat*. (Read at least three chapters.)

WEEK XII

Tuesday, 11 November: Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *A Grain of Wheat* (Finish the novel for today.)
Thursday, 13 November: *A Grain of Wheat*
Prospectus for Paper II due in class; conferences scheduled

WEEK XIII

Tuesday, 18 November: *A Grain of Wheat* concluded; Begin *The Quiet American*
Thursday, 20 November: Greene, *The Quiet American* (Read at least one third of the book for today.) Research Presentations Scheduled

WEEK XIV

THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY--NO CLASS MEETINGS

WEEK XV

Tuesday, 2 December: Greene, *The Quiet American* (Finish reading the novel by today.)
Thursday, 4 December: *The Quiet American* concluded
PAPER II DUE ON THIS DATE
PRESENTATIONS AS SCHEDULED

WEEK XVI

Tuesday, 9 December: RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS AS SCHEDULED
Thursday, 11 December: RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS CONCLUDED
Final Exam Review; Farewells

FINAL EXAM (CUMULATIVE)

(Bring test booklets to your final exam.)

GRADE CALCULATION: Class Participation (Oral and Written), Preparation: 30%
Paper I: 15%; Paper II (including Prospectus and Report): 30%
Cumulative Final Exam: 25%

ENGLISH 4300—ASSIGNMENTS

I. JOURNAL: Keep a separate notebook or journal in which you write your initial and considered responses to reading assignments and class discussion and in which you keep notes of your "outside" reading in history, theory, and criticism. From time to time, you will be asked to write responses in class, and you should add them into your journal when they are returned. Journals are very useful in reviewing for exams and in planning your formal papers and oral presentations. I will not collect or grade journals.

II. ORAL PARTICIPATION AND REPORTS: Students are expected to come prepared to class and to contribute informed comments. Throughout the semester, students may be asked to prepare comments or bring in information relevant to assigned texts and their background.

During the last two class sessions, each participant will present the material of his/her final seminar paper. Do not read your paper; rather present highlights of your insights in as clear and interesting a fashion as you can. The presentation should be carefully timed. Presenters should be prepared to answer questions and respond to the comments of the seminar.

III. PAPER I (800-1400 words/ 3 to 5 typed double-spaced pages) is due on 7 October. Paper I is a focused and analytical discussion of the figure of the politician as depicted in Warren's *All the King's Men*, Trollope's *Phineas Finn*, and Achebe's *A Man of the People*. You may, if you wish, use other works by the author you are discussing, historical background works, or works of literary theory or criticism. Feel free also to refer to history, current events, and "real" politicians. Be sure to quote accurately, indicate all quotes and paraphrases, and document accurately just as you would for a "research paper" (use the MLA system). Please discuss your ideas for an interesting and "argumentative" approach with me.

IV. PAPER II, due on 4 December is a researched critical study of 2000--3000 words analyzing some specific aspect or feature of political, historical, or ideological content in a work of fiction NOT ASSIGNED FOR THE COURSE. The ideal seminar paper will set the chosen work in a comparative context and will link political content, overt or otherwise, to some aspect of narrative technique.

Choose one of the following approaches:

A. Reread a novel that you have read for another class during your college career and analyze it from a political perspective. Read a text that you have previously not considered "political," and examine social and political assumptions that underlie the world created in the work. In your paper, compare treatments of the political issues in the "non-political" work with those in one or more of the overtly political work(s) read for this course.

OR

B. Read (or reread) a novel (not assigned for the course) that is or can be considered overtly political and analyze some very specifically focused aspect of its historical, political, or ideological content in relation to narrative technique. Compare the "outside" work chosen with one or more works assigned for the course.

IV. PAPER II ASSIGNMENT (continued):

The specific focus of the paper and the outside sources (primary and secondary) read in preparing it will be determined by each seminar participant in consultation with me. A working prospectus (one fully developed paragraph, typed and double-spaced) is due on 13 November. The prospectus should indicate the primary works to be discussed, and specify the approach and critical method. The most important secondary sources to be used should also be named. (See course policy statement for details on presentation of papers.)

POLITICAL FICTIONS, FICTIONAL POLITICS EXAMPLES OF WORKS THAT MIGHT LEND THEMSELVES TO POLITICAL ANALYSIS

Chinua Achebe: *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease*, etc.; Henry Adams, *Democracy*; Isabel Allende, *The House of the Spirits*; Anthony Burgess: *A Clockwork Orange*, *The Long Day Wanes*; Albert Camus, *The Plague*; Joyce Cary: *Mr. Johnson*; Joseph Conrad: *Lord Jim*, *Nostromo*, *Under Western Eyes*; J. M. Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians*; Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*; Don DeLillo, *Libra*; Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*; Benjamin Disraeli, *Coningsby*, *Sybil*, etc.; Lawrence Durrell: *Mountolive*; William Faulkner, *Light in August*, *Intruder in the Dust*; Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South*, *Mary Barton*; George Gissing, *Demos* etc.; Gunter Grass, *The Tin Drum*; Graham Greene: *The Comedians*, *The Honorary Consul*; Nadine Gordimer: *Burger's Daughter*, *July's People*, *My Son's Story*; Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*; Henry James, *The Princess Casamassima*; Franz Kafka, *The Trial*; Rudyard Kipling: *Kim*; Arthur Koestler, *The Scum of the Earth*, *Darkness at Noon*; Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, etc.; Doris Lessing: *The Grass Is Singing*; *The Good Terrorist* etc.; Sinclair Lewis, *It Can't Happen Here*; Andre Malraux, *Man's Fate*, etc.; Toni Morrison, *Sula*, *Beloved*; V.S. Naipaul: *In a Free State*, *Guerrillas*, *A Bend in the River*; George Orwell, *Burmese Days*, *1984*, *Homage to Catalonia*; Pynchon, *V*, *Gravity's Rainbow*; Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, *The Fountainhead*; Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, *Shame*, etc.; Paul Scott: *The Jewel in the Crown*; Walter Scott, *Ivanhoe*; John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*; Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; William Styron, *The Confessions of Nat Turner*; Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Devil on the Cross*, etc.; Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. *Breakfast of Champions*; Richard Wright: *Native Son*, *The Outsider*; Leonard Woolf: *The Village in the Jungle*; Zamyatin, *We*

ENGLISH 4300: COURSE POLICIES

Class attendance, punctuality, preparation, and participation are expected and required. Students are responsible for all material covered in class and all announcements or assignments made in class as well as for all assignments on the syllabus. Assignments are to have been completed by class time on the date for which they appear on the syllabus. The books in which the day's assignments are contained should be brought to class.

Remember that "class participation" counts towards the course grade; absence from class will result in a "0" for the day's participation as well as on any graded work due or done in class. Unannounced quizzes on assigned material may be given at any time. There will be no opportunities to make up missed quizzes.

There will be no opportunities to make up a missed test or exam other than in cases of documented medical emergency; (signing in at Health Service does not constitute documentation of a medical emergency).

Major Tests and the Final Exam should be written on test booklets, available at the Union Book Store. Please write tests in ink and on the appropriate booklets.

ALL PAPERS AND OTHER WRITTEN WORK must be handed in on the date due.

1. Work turned in late without advance clearance will not be accepted.
2. Clearance does not constitute an "excuse." Work turned in late with clearance will be penalized, usually at the rate of 5 points per day of lateness.
3. Any lateness may delay the grading and return of the paper, perhaps until the end of the semester.

BE SURE TO KEEP A COPY OF EVERY PAPER YOU HAND IN. IN THE CASE OF A MISSING PAPER, THE STUDENT IS RESPONSIBLE FOR SUPPLYING A COPY.

A NOTE ON PRESENTATION OF PAPERS: Papers must be computer-printed (or typed) on heavy or medium-weight white 9 x 11 paper. The text should be clear and dark--printed on laser or ink-jet printers--no pale or dot-matrix documents will be accepted. Double-space the text, and leave adequate margins. Each paper must have a separate title sheet which includes the title of the paper, course title, instructor's name, student's name, and date of submission. Repeat the title at the top of the first page of text. Papers must be stapled or clipped.

ONLY PAPERS THAT ARE NEAT AND IN CORRECT FORM CAN BE ACCEPTED.

DOCUMENTATION: Use the most recent MLA system to cite both primary and secondary sources used in your papers. The system is fully explained and illustrated in the latest edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. Each student should have access to a copy.

Inform yourself about documentation conventions for electronic-media information and materials. All such materials must be documented, and citation forms are illustrated in recent handbooks; go to the Writing Center for assistance. Electronic-media materials must be evaluated for quality and reliability even more scrupulously than print materials. Please remember that you must absorb and process all materials: downloading is not research.

ACADEMIC HONESTY: All written work (papers, exams, tests, quizzes) must represent your own ideas and your own style. Downloading or copying the work of others constitutes plagiarism. Make sure that all of the written work you hand in is original and independent. Please make sure that you understand the meaning of plagiarism and the policy of the English Department:

Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism--"the appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author and representation of them as one's original work" (Random House Dictionary of the English Language)--has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of the grade of F for the assigned essay and a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office. Respect for the work of others should encompass all formats, including print, electronic, and oral sources.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: "If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Coordinator of the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible."